

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6317

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGUI

AMCONSUL DOUALA

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 0548

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, GB

SUBJ: GABONESE GOVERNMENTAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

1. SUMMARY: DURING PAST WEEK GOG ANNOUNCED CHANGES IN CONSTITUTION ABOLISHING VICE PRESIDENCY, ESTABLISHING OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER, AND CREATING NEW FORMULA FOR PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION. GABON ALSO HAS NEW PRESIDENTS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND SUPREME COURT AND A NUMBER OF MINISTERIAL CHANGES WERE ANNOUNCED. PREVIOUSLY INDEPENDENT (AT LEAST IN THEORY) GABONESE LABOR FEDERATION FESYGA HAS BEEN MADE A SPECIALIZED ORGAN OF THE PARTI DEMOCRATIQUE GABONAIS (PDG), AND THE COUNTRY'S ADMINISTRATIVE SUB-DIVISIONS HAVE BEEN REDESIGNATED. OUR VERY PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS THAT TAKEN TOGETHER, CHANGES REPRESENT FURTHER ELIMINATION OF SEVERAL OLDER AND LESS EFFECTIVE POLITICAL FIGURES, PROMOTION OF SEVERAL YOUNGER AND ABLE MEN, AND TIGHTER CONTROL OF BONGO OVER GABONESE POLITICAL LIFE. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 13, PRESIDENT BONGO IN A TELEVISED ADDRESS

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TO THE NATION ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO CREATE POSITION OF PRIME

MINISTER, TO ABOLISH THE VICE PRESIDENCY AND TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION. SINCE THEN, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PDG, AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAVE BEEN IN SESSION AND HAVE BROUGHT FORTH THE FOLLOWING STRUCTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES IN THE GABONESE GOVERNMENT:

A) UPON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PDG, LEON MEBIAME, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT WAS NAMED PRIME MINISTER BY ACCLAMATION FOLLOWING APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF A DRAFT LAW CREATING THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER AND ABOLISHING THE VICE PRESIDENCY.

B) THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVED A NEW FORMULA FOR PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION THROUGH WHICH A "COLLEGE" COMPOSED OF THE PRIME MINISTER, A MEMBER OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PDG SPECIALLY CHOSEN FOR THE OCCASION, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD ASSUME EXECUTIVE POWER DURING ANY TEMPORARY VACANCY IN THE PRESIDENCY. IN CASE OF A PERMANENT VACANCY, THE "COLLEGE" WOULD EXERCISE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS FOR A PERIOD OF TWO MONTHS, AFTER WHICH THE "COLLEGE" WOULD PROCEED WITH ELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT.

C) NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT GEORGES DAMAS ALEKA HAS RESIGNED ON GROUNDS OF ADVANCED AGE AND HAS BEEN APPOINTED HIGH COUNSELOR TO THE PRESIDENCY. THE NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT IS PAUL GONDJOUT, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT (AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY), WHO IN TURN HAS BEEN REPLACED BY AUGUSTIN BOUMAH, FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND LAND DISTRIBUTION.

D) FOUR FORMER SENIOR CABINET MEMBERS HAVE BEEN DROPPED TO "SPECIAL COUNSELORS IN CHARGE OF MISSION TO THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC." THESE ARE FRANCOIS NGUEMA-NDONG; BONJEAN FRANCOIS ONDO; BENJAMIN NGOUBOU; AND JEAN-ARSENE BOUGUENDZA.
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E) FIVE YOUNGER MEN WHO HAD PROVEN THEMSELVES IN LESSER JOBS IN GOVERNMENT WERE RAISED TO MORE RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS AS FULL MINISTERS: IGOHO, SAULNEROUND MAPANGOU, MOUVAGHA, ANCHOUHEY, AND MOUSSIROU.

F) BY DECISION OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PDG, THE GABONESE LABOR SYNDICATE FESYGA BECAME ON APRIL 14

A SPECIALIZED ORGAN OF THE PARTY.

G) THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS ALSO APPROVED DRAFT LAWS INCREASING THE POWERS OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE PDG WHEREBY THE PB WOULD BE CONSULTED IN A CASE OF NOMINATION OR RECALL OF THE PRIME MINISTER, IN CASES OF DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND IN DECLARING STATES OF SEIGE OR ALERT. SIMILARLY, COUNCIL APPROVED A DRAFT LAW PROVIDING FOR A NEW TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION WITHIN GABON WITH PROVINCES, PREFECTURES, AND SUB-PREFECTURES REPLACING THE FORMER REGIONS, DISTRICTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL POSTS.

H) IN A SOMEWHAT UNRELATED MOVE, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ADOPTED DRAFT LAW ABOLISHING DOUBLE NATIONALITY AND MAKING FOREIGNERS WHO HAVE ACQUIRED GABONESE NATIONALITY LIABLE TO NATIONAL MILITARY SERVICE.

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3. FOLLOWING ANALYSIS IS VERY PRELIMINARY AND WILL BE AMPLIFIED AND CHECKED AS WE DISCUSS SITUATION WITH LOCAL CONTACTS OVER THE NEXT WEEK.

A) CREATION OF PRIME MINISTRY CAME AS SURPRISE BUT ALMOST CERTAINLY DOES NOT MEAN BONGO IS SHARING MORE OF HIS POWER. MEBIAME IS AN UNAMBITIOUS CIPHER WHOSE MAJOR ROLE IS TO BE A VISIBLE FANG FROM THE ESTUARY IN THE BONGO GOVERNMENT. ASSUMING, HOWEVER, (SEE BELOW) THAT BONGO ABOUT TO TAKE SOME UNPOPULAR AND RESTRICTIVE MEASURES, ELEVATION OF MEBIAME MAKES SENSE. IT GIVES GABONESE PUBLIC IMPRESSION THAT POWERFUL FANGS ARE "ON BOARD WITH BONGO". EQUALLY IMPORTANT, MEBIAME WILL IN THEORY AT LEAST BE CHARGED WITH EXECUTION OF LAWS AND PROGRAMS. AS SUCH, HE COULD BE CONVENIENT SCAPEGOAT FOR EITHER UNPOPULAR OR UNSUCCESSFUL MEASURES. ALSO BONGO CAN NOW DISMISS MEBIAME AT WILL WHENEVER HE SO WISHES.

B) REASON GIVEN FOR RESIGNATION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT DAMAS ALEKA PROBABLY PARTLY VALID. AT 72,
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HE HAD SHOWN CONSIDERABLE SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN. APPOINTMENT OF GONDJOUT ON THE OTHER HAND FURTHER COMPLETES PROCESS OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. GONDJOUT, IT WILL BE RECALLED WAS INVOLVED IN THE ABORTIVE COUP ATTEMPT OF FEBRUARY 1964 AGAINST LEON MBA. AFTER BEING ACQUITTED, HE DROPPED OUT OF PUBLIC LIFE UNTIL HIS APPOINTMENT IN 1968 TO THE PRESTIGIOUS BUT POLITICALLY UNIMPORTANT POSITION OF SUPREME COURT PRESIDENT. AS PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AS THAT BODY CURRENTLY CONSTITUTED, GONDJOUT WILL STILL NOT HAVE SIGNIFICANT POWER, BUT AS IN THE CASE OF MEBIAME, HIS APPARENT PROMOTION MAY INDICATE BONGO'S DESIRE TO SHOW THAT EVEN FORMER DISSIDENT LEADERS HAVE BEEN FULLY REINTEGRATED INTO REGIME. THE APPOINTMENT OF FORMER MINISTER OF STATE IN CHARGE OF PLAN, AUGUSTIN BOUMAH TO THE PRESIDENCY OF THE SUPREME COURT REPRESENTS FURTHER LOSS OF INFLUENCE OF BOUMAH THROUGH KICKING HIM UPSTAIRS.

C) NEW PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION FORMULA DOES REMOVE IN SOMEWHAT COMPLICATED FASHION PRVIOUS QUESTION MARK ON THIS SUBJECT. WHEN BONGO SUCCEEDED TO THE PRESIDENCY UPON THE DEATH OF LEON MBA, ONE OF HIS FIRST MOVES WAS TO ABOLISH THE PROVISION THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT AUTOMATICALLY SUCCEEDS THE PRESIDENT. NEW FORMULA BY CREATING THREE MEMBER "COLLEGE" MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ANY ONE INDIVIDUAL BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION TO GROOM HIMSELF FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

D) APPOINTMENT OF FOUR NEW "SPECIAL COUNSELORS" IS CLEAR DEMOTION OF OLDER AND LESS DESIRABLE FUNCTIONARIES.

NGUEMA-NDONG HAS IN RECENT CABINET SHUFFLES BEEN DROPPED INTO INCREASINGLY LOWER RANKING JOBS AND IS KEPT AROUND AS ONE OF BONGO'S HOUSE FANGS; ONDO IS A SECOND-RATER, AND NGOUBOU AN OLD WAR HORSE REPUTED TO BE A CONFIRMED ALCOHOLIC. BOUGUENDZE IS RELATIVELY UNKNOWN HAVING SERVED PREVIOUSLY AS PREFECT IN THE NYANGA AND OGOOUE-IVINDO.

E) PROMOTION OF FIVE YOUNGER MEN CONTINUES BONGO'S POLICY OF GRADUALLY REPLACING OLDER AND LESS COMPETENT
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MEN BY YOUNGER ABLER ONES.

F) ANOTHER CHANGE OF SOME SIGNIFICANCE MAY WELL BE THE BRINGING OF FESYGA UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL OF THE PDG. PREVIOUSLY, FESYGA WAS INDEPENDENT BUT HAD A SEAT ON THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PARTY THROUGH WHICH LIASON BETWEEN THE TWO ENTITIES WAS MAINTAINED. THOUGH ALWAYS IN A SENSE SUBJECT TO PARTY DISCIPLINE, THE FESYGA WAS PROUD OF ITS RELATIVE INDEPENDENCE. THERE MAY BE IDEALISTIC MEMBERS WHO WILL RESENT HAVING THEIR WINGS CLIPPED. THE RANK AND FILE REACTION TO THIS DECISION IS SOMETHING THEREFORE WE WILL BE WATCHING CAREFULLY.

4. KEY MINISTERS SUCH AS RAWIRI, OKUMBA, MBOUY-BOUTZIT AND MOUKAMBI RETAINED THEIR POSITIONS ALMOST UNCHANGED.

5. COMPOSITION NEW GOVERNMENT BEING SENT SEPTTEL..

6. FURTHER COMMENTS FOLLOW BY AIRGRAM.
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